2 Realist global governance

Revisiting cave! hic dracones and beyond

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Introduction

In her contribution to the 1983 volume *International Regimes*, Susan Strange provided a scathing commentary on the concept of international regimes and the enthusiastic endorsement it was receiving by the international relations (IR) theoretical community at the time. The title of her essay, translated from pre-Columbian maps of the world beyond Europe, was “beware! here be dragons!” and it indicated her belief that there were a number of “dragons” that IR scholars would encounter if they insisted upon utilizing the concept of regimes as it had been formulated for the volume (Strange 1983: 337). Many of us know that essay well and, although its warnings went unheeded, many of the dragons Strange identified remain topical to the study of international regimes and other approaches in IR. As with Strange’s contribution to the regimes volume, this essay finds much to be skeptical about the promotion of GG as a new approach to the study of IR. The editors of this collection have correctly identified the essential fault-lines embedded in our discussions of GG. In doing so they have underscored the fact that while there are multiple definitions and eclectic approaches to GG, there are also lurking dragons embedded in and common to many of them.

One of the more significant of these dragons is how to examine GG as a phenomenon that is simultaneously about structure and process. If the rallying cry for co-determination is going to mean anything, we need to think in terms of theoretical frameworks that allow for the combination of structure and history or, as Walker has argued, that “recognize that the claims of identity and those of difference are not mutually exclusive” (1987: 83). Realism has traditionally been harangued for having placed, as Lapid puts it, an “exclusive bet on stability and continuity” (1996a: 6), and for, according to Ferguson and Mansbach, having paid “inadequate attention to the dynamic side of world politics—the sources and consequences of change” (1996: 16). Alternatively, many approaches to and discussions of GG have chosen instead to bet on the dynamic aspects of world politics, insisting that GG is primarily a verb and can only be understood as such. The problem with any exclusive bet, however, whether it is on structural stability or process dynamics, is that it entails value judgments about what is
worthy of study and how to do so. It reflects an academic practice that Strange characterized as “a kind of analytical chiaroscuro” (Strange 1983: 349), which leaves in the shadow those aspects of world politics that do not fit a particular analytical perspective, while highlighting those aspects that do.

The application of a term such as “governance” to the global level unwittingly assists in this obfuscation, by suggesting that regulation, restraint, and control do not depend on or require the existence of sovereign political units. In so doing, the standard notion of GG indirectly reifies the very things that so many well-intentioned transnational activists would seek to change. It gives the erroneous impression that governance, as with regimes, is “indeed slowly advancing against the forces of disorder and anarchy” (Strange 1983: 349), and it directs attention away from the underlying structures of sovereignty and the sites of political and economic power in the global system. Thus as with Strange’s response to international regimes, I am concerned not simply with whether a GG approach to global politics will prove helpful to students and scholars seeking to understand it, but “whether it may not even be actually negative in its influence, obfuscating and confusing instead of clarifying and illuminating, and distorting by concealing bias instead of revealing and removing it” (Strange 1983: 337).

My own realist alternative perspective to process-based definitions of and approaches to GG would be more accurately characterized as a description of the transhistorical power project that makes particular, historical regional/world orders and rule systems possible. As such, it is a realist explanation for co-determination in global politics in that it strives to theoretically combine structure/noun and process/verb in a deductively satisfying manner. It is but one version of co-determination, as other chapters in this volume indicate, and I am not the only author in this collection concerned with the fire-breathing dragons that attend most discussions of GG. But perhaps it is always the job of the realist to ferret such dragons out, since some level of cynicism is embedded in the realist approach itself. As Guzzini observes, “the bottom-line of realism is a particular form of skepticism,” (1998: 203) or Buzan that, “much of realism can be read as a sophisticated form of fatalism” (1996: 61). One suspects that the role of skeptic and that of realist are considered to be one and the same within the discipline, and in that regard I will not disappoint. I do insist, however, that such skepticism does not contradict a position of ethics and that, as Spegele (2001) has argued, it may even be the necessary foundation for it.

**Structure, history, and realism**

How can a commitment to atemporal structuralism be consistent with the political-cultural dynamism that swirls around us on a daily global basis? Clearly no explanatory resolutions are achieved or knowledge gained by simply trading in structure for history. I gather this is the point when Ferguson and Mansbach note that a complete rejection of realism would be to “throw the baby out with the bath water” (1996: 6) or when Beer and Hariman observe that one “can never
wholly do without realism" (1996: 25). Yet how can a structural realist commitment provide an understanding of GG as a co-determined phenomenon? It is perhaps simplest to start with the end point, a basic definition of GG, and then explain how it is possible to arrive at such a definition with realism.

GG can be defined as the existence of some semblance of order and organization in the affairs of interacting human groupings, these in turn having internal structures which allocate resources essential to their members. As an inter-group phenomenon, GG is a structural regularity born out of species sociability and the dynamics of inter-group interaction, which include the need to order interaction in some way (for practical, moral, and psychological reasons) and relative, allocative power as a primary means to do so. There has always been inter-group governance in this sense and there always will be, although until recently its scope was historically more regional than global and its specific content has and always will vary from epoch to epoch. In other words, GG is simultaneously a structural and historical phenomenon. It is structural in that its reoccurrence as a general phenomenon is due to the social nature of human beings as a species. But it is also historical in that its content varies according to the vagaries of the powerful actors who are responsible for creating any particular rule system.

Realism's capacity to provide such a perspective on GG, and thereby treat structure and history as co-determining, derives from its conception of anarchy as an environment separate from what human beings do in it. Despite that separation, or actually because of it, realist explanations have always needed real human beings of flesh and blood to make choices in response to and as a reflection of their environment. It is only through individuals and the collective social practices they create that structure is manifest and the universal both realized and recognized. In this regard, human beings are not empty vessels into which structure pours its deterministic effects. Rather human beings, as a species, bring something with them to the historical table that produces human structural effects that no single individual or collective of human beings in history can control or prevent.

Such a statement clearly marks my structuralist perspective as neoclassical rather than neo-realist, since it intentionally throws human nature back into the explanatory mix. But it is not the qualities of power or aggression that are relevant here; it is instead the tendency to form groups itself, the predisposition to be social as a species, that human beings are bringing with them to the table. That predisposition leads to the formation of collectives with social practices which bind and differentiate them from other collectives. It thereby provides a boundary within which all human beings exist and interact, and that boundary produces dynamics of its own that human beings have replicated throughout history, even as they have found infinite ways to socially differentiate themselves and their collectives.

It is interesting to consider how common it has become in IR theory circles to state, in opposition to a structural realist perspective, that human beings are social creatures, as if being social were incompatible with realist theorizing or
meant that we have a better chance of creating nicer polities with nicer people in them that produce nicer outcomes. In fact, however, most scholars who hail socialization as a vindication of non-realist assumptions have failed to consider why it is that we are social and how these ultimate causes have already been anticipated by realists. The why only makes sense from a Darwinian evolutionary perspective, of which realism is an explanatory replication in the realm of politics. Being social evolved as an adaptive mechanism for species survival and came about due to the competitive selection pressures of the natural environment. The length and particulars of the human infant’s gestation were undoubtedly contributing factors; so too was the extent to which individual humans survived longer and in better health when they stayed together, thereby providing a better chance to reproduce. The result of these selection pressures was and still is a natural predisposition to sociability on the part of the species.

This predisposition does not derive from a single gene, nor is it a single characteristic. It is entwined with intelligence, consciousness, emotions, and language, and it resides in the entire human body and mind, which have been “hard-wired” to be social, to seek identification with other human beings, and to form collectives with other human beings. This is a result of biological evolutionary processes for the species itself. That humans, society, and reasoning go together at all is rooted in natural-selection processes and species survival, which is ultimately and decidedly a realist answer in quality, even if Onuf is correct that the proximate causes for social practice and reason are not biological (1989: 46, 100). Put another way, realists assume that a human being is, as Crawford notes, “an animal capable of reason” (2000: 73–4), because it is only by virtue of having been quite literally animals that reasoning became a possibility for the human species.

It is also important to underscore that to be social is not to be nice, however much our popular usage of the term in English might suggest. A quick check of the thesaurus reveals that in English not only does it mean friendly, affable, and pleasant, but also human, worldly, cultural, political, public, racial, secular, and common. These are not words we usually associate with the friends we interact with at dinner parties, but then again it is precisely because people are social that they can organize quite effectively for war and kill large numbers of their own species in relatively short order. No wonder then, that Lapid accurately describes realism as “a tradition that subscribes to an ontology of conflictual group fragmentation,” and that there is a “realist consensus concerning ontology (conflictual group fragmentation) and problematique (survival/war)” (1996b: 239, 240). Realists have always put groups at the center of their analysis, and groups exist because human beings are a fundamentally social species. Obviously human beings are made up of myriad biological, physiological, and psychological attributes and processes that make their sociability distinct from other social species. The point is, however, that to be social does not mean we get along well with others or that we can control our own destinies through our social practices.

What it does mean is that we form collectives which differentiate themselves from other collectives by a variety of means, but primarily (and distinctively, relative
to other species) by developing and adopting differing social practices. These social practices bind us together, give meaning to our identities and actions, provide us with a means of acquiring and allocating resources, and direct us toward distinguishing difference with other individuals and collectives. It is in the development of these collectives that we produce a structural pattern of in-group/out-group bias which is and will remain basic to human interaction. As Kowert and Legro put it, “people’s need for identity in social relations” is “so strong that they will invent in-group and out-group identities and differences even when there is no rational basis for doing so” (1996: 204, emphasis original; see also Mercer 1995). Why people have this need and the transhistorical patterns it produces are the stuff of realist theory.

Yet being social is merely the ultimate cause for these patterns; it can tell us nothing of the content of being social or the proximate causes for social practices. In other words, as humans form groups and interact across groups, they unintentionally create recognizable patterns, but these patterns do not determine the content of groups or their social practices. These patterns are instead the structural boundaries which devolve from the need on the part of human beings to form groups in the first place. They serve as boundaries for human interaction itself and within which the social practices they create will develop and evolve. Patterns such as in-group/out-group favoritism and discrimination, cooperative social practices within groups and competitive social practices without, a fixation on relative power between groups, the imitation of alternative social practice, and the institutional layering of imitated practices can all be derived from the very act of group formation. Thus structure is born from what human beings are and is the dynamic that arises when what they are naturally promotes their interaction with one another.

However, because Onuf is correct that we are not actualized as human beings until we are socialized as human beings, our biological “stuff” does not and cannot determine our lives, our becoming-in-the-world, and even our being? We do that in the sense that we develop the “ties that bind,” the intersubjective meanings to communicate thoughts and emotions and purposes, and the practices and institutions that give meaning to our activities and guide our activities and meanings in turn. These can only have been licensed by a biological predisposition to be social, but there is no primordial “right way,” no handbook given out to every species at the dawn of evolutionary time for how to guarantee survival in an environment of resource competition and natural selection. Because we also have minds, consciousness, feelings, and above all language, our individual and species survival is as tied to the social practices we create as those practices are in turn a result of our need to survive. They are both a means to an end and an end in themselves, which is why human beings experiment almost endlessly with social practices and yet simultaneously cling dearly to them. The why we form groups is clear and beyond our grasp, the how we form groups is not clear but within our grasp.

The creation of social practice and intersubjective meanings is also an imaginative act and our imaginations are vast and amazing indeed. But it is not
imagination without limits, because it is bounded by why we needed to be social in the first place, and so imagination conforms to the boundaries of group interaction in their broadest outline, even as its content is varied and unique. And because we can never be sure that what we create really will obtain our survival, we are predisposed to experiment with and imitate social practice, even as we seek to demarcate and reify social practice because it is so essential to our survival. The dual tendency to experiment and reify derives from the same source, the how, and leads to ever more unique and particular practices, themselves often the unintended consequences of their creators and imitators. All of which remains bounded by the dynamics of group interaction, the why, which the particularisms of social practice can never surmount. Indeed human particularisms can only exist because there is a specific structure to human existence, yet simultaneously the specific structure of human existence can only occur because there are human particularisms in social practice. Structure and history are indivisible, not alternative, with atemporal forms of social interaction deriving from structure, particular contents of social interaction deriving from history, and with being and becoming both deriving concurrently from the same source—the human imperative to be social.

What this means for explanation is that while the broad-brush strokes of structure may be predictable, what is not predictable are the colors and precise positioning of the strokes. The former are atemporal, while the latter are historically contingent. To understand the first we must examine the patterns of group formation and interaction throughout recorded human history; to understand the second we must study the particular agents and unique institutions of the historical moment. Put another way, structure involves broad themes such as balance of power, and we may observe instances of it in much the same way that a biologist observes that a species has wings or an art historian that a painting is of the Madonna and Child. The form tells us nothing of the specifics. It cannot tell us what the relative size or shape of the wing will be in different species, nor can it predict that there will be stark differences between an early Gothic British or Byzantine rendering of the same religious subject. Similarly form cannot tell us specifically who will balance, against whom and what the immediate causes for this will be, how the effort will exactly unfold, what the outcome will look like precisely, and any specific effects on the actors involved or on global politics in general and into the future. This is the content of history and to understand it one must study history, not structure. Alternatively it is the latter that explains why balances-of-power form at all. The general form of balance-of-power is repeated, patterned, and knowable. The specific content of balances-of-power is not.

What this means for explanation is that there are limitations on what either structure or history alone can explain, and these limitations need to be recognized before one plunges into the empirical morass of daily life in order to draw conclusions about what is happening, why it is happening, and what will happen in global politics in the future. Too often theoretical IR analyses, both of the realist and non-realist kind, either confuse structural and historical
effects, thereby reifying historical effects as if they were structural and vice versa, or choose between the two, thereby falling victim to pure forms of universalism or particularism that are neither satisfying as explanation nor relevant to the way in which we live our lives now and in the future. It is only by examining how structure and history come together in any particular moment in time that we confront the most pertinent political questions of our times and have something relevant to say to agents beyond the academy. Realism’s unswerving commitment to structuralism actually allows it to incorporate both history and structure under the same rubric and in a way that theoretical approaches which only see change and history cannot. As Walker has noted, “the problematic of change, time, and becoming is in fact constitutive of the realist position itself” (1987: 72), and I would add that approaches which reject or jettison structuralism will fail to confront this essential problematic in any meaningful way, if at all.

**Global governance as a transhistorical power project**

How, then, does this discussion help us understand GG as a co-determined phenomenon? First, it indicates that what accounts for the regular production of GG systems throughout history is species sociability itself. That is, humans will form groups and, for a variety of reasons (practical, moral, psychological, etc.), human groupings create some degree of order and organization in their interactions with one another. Second, it indicates that GG will always be produced by the choices and actions of the relatively powerful groups, and so the primary means by which inter-group order is established is relative, allocative power. These are the structural parameters of GG, in that the human propensity to form groups promotes inter-group competition for resource allocation and, by necessity, elevates power as a primary means to achieve this end. Yet such inter-group competition also promotes an historical process that makes GG a time-bound phenomenon that could just as easily be analyzed as a verb.

This is because the relatively powerful groups will shape the content of GG systems based on their own internal particulars. Hence the content of GG varies according to the interests and social practices of the powerful human groupings of the particular epoch, be they clans, tribes, kingdoms, city-states, empires, nation-states, or principalities. While Ferguson and Mansbach (1996) have documented the multiple, varied identities and loyalties which create simultaneous and overlapping polities in any given time period, it is still possible to identify the relatively powerful polities of a period and in a region. One can do so by comparing both the allocative capacities of alternative institutional forms among existing polities (along the lines of Spruyt 1994), and the relative power among polities that share similarly effective allocative capacities and institutional forms (along the lines of Waltz 1979). These polities will promote and propagate a form of collective inter-group order that will be specific to them, and they will do so because they believe (rightfully so) that it will allow them to obtain what is of socially constructed importance to them.
Hence the basis for any system of GG will be the social practices to which the powerful groups themselves subscribe. To put this another way, in order to exist at all, according to Reus-Smit, a group must develop a set of "hegemonic beliefs about the moral purpose" of its own existence. This serves as a core from which a normative complex derives involving "the justificatory foundations for the organizing principle of sovereignty" (thereby helping to differentiate this collective from that one), and "the norm of procedural justice" necessary to the effective function of allocative institutions and decisions within the collective (thereby determining who gets what within the group) (1999: 6). Reus-Smit refers to this normative complex as a "meta-value ensemble," and they determine what he calls the "licensing mentalities" or the mental horizons of systemic institutional builders. It is from this internal normative complex that the specific institutions and procedures of governance arise within a given collective. And, he argues, these same ensembles are the basis for ordering collective interactions on a regional or global scale.10

While Reus-Smit acknowledges that power plays a role in determining whose normative complexes become the basis for inter-group governance, he leaves unanalyzed the extent to which any particular GG system is but one example of a transhistorical power project. The form that GG takes in any given period of time always derives from the meta-value ensembles of the relatively powerful polities. Such polities propagate some form of GG because it allows them to obtain what is of socially constructed importance to them in both a material and ideational sense. It is not simply that the powerful determine how to "do business" with one another in a utilitarian, rule-system sense. It is, in addition and more importantly, that the powerful determine who counts as an appropriate entity, what counts as an appropriate activity, and what counts as existence itself for any given period of time.11 Although at first glance GG may simply appear to be a collective good that allows groups to mutually obtain their self-interests, in fact a system of GG is one of the ultimate expressions of power and its structural centrality to global politics.

Because any given system of GG will always be licensed and bounded by the social practices of the powerful, both its existence (noun) and practice (verb) are a form of embedded power. In fact, the creation of any particular GG system should be ranked on a par with waging and winning world wars, which is something that classical realists certainly recognized and some of the more contemporary realist scholarship has come to acknowledge as well.12 All other individuals and entities on the planet who will be subjected to a particular system of GG have one basic choice: either participate in the system or try to get out of its way.13 Even direct challengers who wish to reconfigure a particular GG system will, as Gilpin (1981) and Waltz (1979) have both observed, engage with it and frequently participate competitively as a means to amass the power necessary to try to change it. However participation by those who do not share the same meta-value ensembles does not necessarily require coercion. As Ikenberry and Kupchan have noted, "although socialization is triggered by coercion and material inducements, the process of socialization can lead to outcomes that are
not explicable simply in terms of the exercise of coercive power” (1990: 315). This is because groups with dissimilar social practices often voluntarily adopt the alternative ordering parameters of the powerful. Social practices are the means to the end of survival within anarchy, and the ensembles of the relatively powerful are particularly attractive means, thereby being the subject of considerable imitation by others.

Yet, because identity is always formed and given meaning within group social practices, there is a simultaneous structural incentive for groups to reify pre-existing social practices. Imitators will layer and meld alternative mental horizons and institutions onto existing ensembles, thereby unintentionally creating new institutional and meta-value ensemble variations. The variations this layering creates are the pool from which potential institutional challenges and alternatives to prevailing meta-value ensembles, institutional arrangements, and GG systems will emerge. Such challenges and alternatives will inevitably emerge because the basis for any given GG system is the relative power of the collectives that created it. Given the structural property that compels humans to form groups which will inevitably compete for resources, all meta-value ensembles, institutional arrangements, and GG systems are subject to decline and demise and therefore are historically situated. There is no “end of history” thesis in realism, because the constant drive among groups to acquire and balance power ensures that the basis for any system of GG is relatively fleeting. And although many individuals and polities might believe in a particular system’s efficacy, ultimately no GG system can survive the decline of those powerful collectives who have promoted and defended it.

On the other hand, what provides the constant and dynamic source for new meta-value ensembles, institutional arrangements, and GG systems is the tendency to imitate and layer alternative social practices. This tendency also derives from the human need to form groups and culturally glue them together, but what it produces is continual innovation to and variation in meta-value ensembles and institutions. Some of these new ensemble and institutional variations will prove to be relatively more adept at amassing resources on behalf of their collectives. Hence these will be the basis for new GG systems in the future, as well as the objects of emulation by other collectives. This dynamic process produces ever more interesting and unanticipated social possibilities, since the pursuit of power involves not only the material and technological capacity to amass resources but a collective ideational foundation that sanctions the pursuit of power on behalf of the collective. It is impossible to anticipate the precise parameters that will constitute power in the future, and hence the form that GG will take, because material capacity is always wedded to and authorized by hegemonic beliefs about the moral purpose of the collective that are subject to layered innovation as well. Yet this dynamic process is bounded in recurring and anticipated ways by the human imperative to form collectives that compete for resources. In this way, structure and history interact to ensure that GG is a trans-historical power project whose institutional and normative particulars are constantly and historically in flux.
Studying contemporary GG: imagined dragons and genuine fire-breathers

Since meta-value ensembles vary across time and space and make any particular GG historically contingent, it is essential to distinguish ultimate, structural elements from historical, proximate causes when studying contemporary GG. Reus-Smit provides a reasonably accurate description of the governance of our own times which is based on the belief that “the moral purpose of the modern state lies in the augmentation of individuals’ purposes and potentialities,” with the source of sovereignty located in the people (1999: 123, 129; see also Reus-Smit 2001). This has given rise to legislative justice and, at the system level, codified international law as the norm of procedural justice for guiding interactions among nation-states. It has been assisted by “a generic institutional form of multilateralism” which, according to Ruggie, “coordinates behavior among three or more states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct,” with the internal principles and politics of the powerful being as important to the delination and propagation of these principles as the fact that they are the powerful in a relative sense (1992: 567, 574).

In contrast to much of the “Multilateralism Matters” literature, Reus-Smit argues that the meta-values that produced international law and multilateralism as the basis for inter-group interaction and justice were not simply American but European as well. Certainly Ruggie is also correct that it took American power to ensure its endurance and scope after World War II (Ruggie 1992), but the fact that other relatively powerful groups already shared these meta-values is what provided a receptive climate for them to become the ordering principles of the day. Western Europe’s receptivity to contemporary GG was also encouraged by bipolarity (Mearsheimer 1990), and other nation-states and entities increasingly found they had to operate within parameters promoted by the meta-values of the powerful, which only furthered the process whereby these became the principles for the global system of collective interaction.

Because scholars and students of IR tend to either choose between structure and history or confuse their effects in the analysis of contemporary GG, there is a tendency to ask all the wrong questions about the content and parameters of the map of contemporary GG. Dragons are seen where there actually are none, and genuine fire-breathers that exist at the edge of the map, and hence at the nexus of structure and history, are overlooked or ignored. Much is made, for example, of disagreements between the United States and other nation-states over such issues as the establishment of an international criminal court, the efficacy of banning land mines, the identification of collective security threats, or the health risks of genetically altered food. These are interesting historical processes and outcomes that underscore the structural centrality of differing social practices, group competition, and balance of power to contemporary GG. Yet such processes are frequently taken to mean that the powerful have somehow been displaced by their own creations and we can therefore stop talking about them and power in general. The drive to cooperate, we are told, takes on a “life
of its own" which no longer depends on the original foundation of power to survive and flourish.

Certainly it is the case that such processes and outcomes are only understandable if the historical evolution of any particular system of GG results from a variety of interacting sources. How any particular system of GG evolves is an historical question, however, and it should not be confused with why there is any evolution to systems of GG, which is a structural question. To observe that, having promoted international law as a basic procedural norm of the present GG system, the US frequently now finds itself isolated by those who would use the procedural norm against it, is certainly an interesting historical phenomenon. But it does nothing to displace the relative power that made international law the procedural norm of contemporary GG and which reifies the embedded power of its creators. Such outcomes and processes can only occur because the contemporary system of GG steers potential challenges to it into avenues that are both acceptable to and controllable by the creators of that system.\textsuperscript{17} Thus to challenge the United States with its own rules when one is essentially playing by those same rules is not much of a challenge to history and is certainly none to structure.

Similarly one finds an enormous flourishing of NGOs in the world today and about which much is made in theoretical circles, but these obtain legal and economic status only through a system of governance which promotes ordering principles determined by the powerful nation-states. Surely one can argue that NGOs have done much to raise awareness within nation-states about myriad problems, and they have saved the lives of many people in the process. But those are historical effects and should not be confused with the structural parameters of GG which remain firmly rooted in collectives with relative power and an ability to structure time and space for historically contingent social practices. NGOs might affect the latter in particular and unanticipated ways, but they do not directly affect the former, being creatures themselves of a system of contemporary GG that has already determined their status in the world and relative to power.\textsuperscript{18} Trying to explain contemporary GG by focussing exclusively on historical processes such as NGOs, civil-society movements, technological change, and economic interdependence is like trying to explain global weather patterns by looking outside your window. It is, as Strange said of the equivalent in the study of regimes, "one of those shifts of fashion not too difficult to explain as a temporary reaction to events in the real world but in itself making little in the way of a long-term contribution to knowledge" (1983: 337).

Most structural perspectives on contemporary GG fare no better, because they tend to ignore the essential role that history plays in the GG transhistorical power project. Contemporary GG is instead treated as if it were a systemic phenomenon separated from the historical, internal meta-value ensembles that made it possible in the first place. This has led to ongoing explanatory problems for realists, liberals, and constructivists alike. In trying to say something meaningful about global politics on the basis of polarity alone, realists have tended to argue that international law and multilateralism are merely rhetorical devices
disguising traditional balance of power politics. Such claims are captured in phrases such as “liberal talk, realist thinking” or “organized hypocrisy.” Alternatively, liberals and constructivists have tended to treat international institutions and norms as if they could provide the basis for a genuine commitment to transnational as opposed to merely national cooperation.

The result is that we end up with surprises all around when powerful nation-states invest time and energy in supporting contemporary GG or when they blatantly ignore and undermine it. Much analytical energy is then expended on explaining these surprises in ways that are equally unsatisfactory, all because the glaring warnings written on the edge of the contemporary GG map, to study it as a phenomenon of co-determination, have been ignored. The normative hypocrisy that appears to be endemic to the contemporary GG system is due to the way in which the content of history and what is structurally transhistorical to human interaction have merged in this particular epoch. Given the content of many historical meta-value ensembles, it does not necessarily follow that all systems of GG involve a contradiction between GG systems and the normative complexes that license them. The contemporary system of GG, however, is based on a meta-value ensemble whose particular content is in normative and practical contradiction with the structural parameters that make any system of GG possible.

To be more specific, the moral purpose of the nation-state involves serving the needs of its individual members, all of whom have been socialized to believe that this is the proper ordering of the universe. What makes this noteworthy is not that the nation-state justifies itself, and its need to amass resources on its own behalf, on the basis of a particular normative complex, since all collectives must do that in some way. It is instead that the nation-state does so on behalf of its individual members for whom it is meant to assist a process of actualization, augmentation, and possibly even self-perfection. The result is that the type of ordering mentality we have today is not merely territorially bounded, as so many constructivists and functionalists are apt to highlight (for example, Ruggie 1998). Rather the ordering mentality is territorially bounded on behalf of the collective’s smallest constituent unit—the individual—and not vice versa. Hence the nation-state evolved as a political and social institution to help its own individual members achieve equal rights and personal fulfillment.

This is the philosophical basis for the nation-state’s moral purpose and for most Western nation-states it has produced a genuine commitment to the ideas and language of universal individual augmentation, the equal application of its law, and suffrage for its citizens. To argue as Mearsheimer does that Americans behave as realists but are rhetorically committed to liberalism because it “is so deeply rooted in their culture” is to miss the fact that liberalism is their culture (2002: 28). The US and the European nation-states wouldn’t exist as “nation-states” today if a genuine commitment to Enlightenment ideas had not plainly informed their own institutional development. The apparent hypocrisy, if it can even be called that, derives instead from the application of this moral purpose to inter-group relations. Modern legitimate statehood involves, as Reus-Smit has
observed, "a discourse that seeks to justify territorial particularism on the grounds of ethical universalism" (2001: 520). While it is the case that all meta-value ensembles and GG systems occur within a structural context that demands particularism, the scope and content of the present set of meta-value ensembles involves an ethics of universal individual elevation. When such ethics become the basis for ordering international relations, it contradicts the very legitimacy that nation-states acquire by sustaining these ethics on behalf of their own particular individuals.

There are various sites throughout the global system where we can see this contradiction, and hence the edge of the GG map where the nexus of history and structure lies, most clearly. One such site can be found in the national court systems, where national judges grapple with cases involving the application of and consistency between national and international laws, both of which result from the same norm of procedural justice (see, for example, the Goldstein and Ban chapter in this volume). Another can be found in the immigration policies of liberal societies, which on the whole have proven to be exceedingly illiberal (Hollifield 1992). It is at sites such as these that there is a convergence in the elements of universalism and particularism, in power and possibility, in "metaphysical universals and a realm of becoming, between being and being-in-the-world, the latter having identity and reality only through participation in the former" (Walker 1987: 75).

Even the most imaginative institution builder must therefore contend with the fact (or is cognitively yet unconsciously representative of this mentality in turn) that the nation-state’s purpose is to satisfy the needs and wants of the individuals who comprise it. It is for this reason that these individuals have banded together into this type of unit in this moment in time, and it is upon this basis that the nation-state justifies its own actions vis-à-vis other nation-states and other types of entities. For all practical purposes, the only jurors who matter to the evaluation of each nation-state’s choices and behaviors are its own leaders and publics, and they do so on the basis of how well it has augmented them. The social beings the nation-state creates have licensing mentalities that confirm this as the proper ordering of the cosmos. This is why, despite deep inequalities in the world, that guarantee more people will die each day from poverty than warfare (Zalewski 1996: 351; Murphy 2001), this is only viewed as a "problem" in relation to each nation-state’s own individuals. This is why, according to Buzan and Little, “the main centers of supposedly postmodern evolution in North America, Europe, and Japan also remain remarkably parochial, culturally self-centered, and politically inward looking” (2000: 361). And this is why, according to Thomson, “powerful states, which have benefited from participating in a particular practice, ban it when it becomes a threat to themselves” (1992: 198).

Although it is tempting to label such behavior “hypocrisy,” and Krasner (1999) is certainly correct that it is an endemic rather than aberrant feature of contemporary GG, to do so is analytically misleading. It suggests that national leaders and the societies they represent are insincere about individual universalism and that they are engaged in a form of premeditated rhetorical duplicity
in order to obtain some alternative, hidden goal. In fact, however, the relatively powerful societies that have created contemporary GG are quite sincere about universal augmentation and suffrage for the individuals of their own particular collectives. In this there is no duplicity, no double-standard for the polity that is the nation-state. It is a contradiction, however, when it is the basis for a system of GG, because it implies that a structure of authority should act to protect and augment individuals everywhere. Since such a structure of authority does not exist (and will not, given the human imperative to form groups that will compete), contemporary GG encourages the erroneous belief that we can have these universalistic goals without the particularisms that made them possible as a system of GG. As Griffiths and O’Callaghan put it, “suffering...does not correlate with territorial boundaries, but the political capacity to respond to it does. Our cosmopolitan moral sentiments are constantly frustrated by our particularistic political identities as citizens” (2001: 192).

It is an ironic twist of history that the nation-state, as the dominant political unit of the moment, produces a particularly parochial licensing mentality, yet the shared desire for universal suffrage and equality is a direct result of it. The very content of the nation-state’s moral purpose encourages the fanciful notion that the nation-state and its moral purpose are mutually exclusive. The effects this self-delusion have had on our scholarship are well documented by Brown, who notes that, “the inability of mainstream American social scientists to understand those many features of the modern world that reflect diversity and difference stems from its universalism” and that “the real irony is that if American social science was more parochial it would have a better chance of getting things right” (2001: 216). This self-delusion also runs rampant among national leaders, who continually rely on and promote notions of universal human rights and suffrage, even as they have been elected to protect and defend a very narrow and particular segment of the earth’s population.22

Perhaps worst of all is that this self-delusion misdirects the energy of activists in a host of transnational issue areas, who have been encouraged to believe that international law and the multilateralism associated with it can emancipate us from the evils of particularism embodied by the nation-state. Unfortunately these are not particularly good vehicles if universal suffrage and equality are your goals. One cannot hope to piggy-back off the nation-state’s own moral purpose and norms of justice and then expect to sneak up on and overturn it. Nor can these norms of justice be used as a vehicle to make power, in both its stark utilitarian and its embedded constitutive sense, any less relevant to the conduct of global affairs. As Buzan and Little note, “while some IGOs and INGOs might have achieved significant levels of relative autonomy, it is much less clear either that they have escaped the dominion of the state, or that they are themselves plausible candidates for status as new types of dominant units” (2000: 361). In fact, international law and much of what passes as cooperation these days merely serves to reify both the nation-state as the dominant political unit of the moment and the social practices and licensing mentalities of the powerful nation-states in particular.
Some final thoughts on the future of GG and its study

There is always a temptation to search for solace in the fact that the nation-state will not be the dominant polity in the future and that its demise will somehow provide a resolution in favor of the universalistic principles its GG system has promoted. It is correct that there will be a resolution of sorts, but the particulars of such a resolution hold out no more hope for the final realization of the nation-state's moral purpose on a global scale (absent it as the dominant polity) than the contemporary GG system does now. Thanks to a knowledge of structure, we know that group competition produces a constant evolutionary dynamism to social practice, polity creation and demise, relative power, and GG systems. Hence we know that the nation-state will be replaced with alternative types of dominant polities in the future, and that whatever internal moral purposes justify the existence of these polities will also serve as the basis for future GG systems. The particular set of meta-value ensembles to which we at present subscribe are only the latest justificatory version for collective existence, and there will be other meta-value ensembles and licensing mentalities in the future.

However, those who would search in such a formula for certainty in the content of those meta-value ensembles, licensing mentalities, and hence GG systems will be sorely disappointed. The specific content of any meta-value ensemble results from the historical ways in which group competition, power, and social practice interact and dynamically evolve new and unanticipated contents. That is, we can predict the basic pattern to future institutional evolution, but we cannot predict its content. This is because institutional evolution occurs in a competitive group context that selects polities according to their relative capacity to amass resources effectively on their behalf. What any polity seeks to amass will be defined by and contingent on its own internal meta-value ensembles which are neither entirely static nor entirely novel. It is this melding of institutions and mental horizons that makes possible the alternative hegemonic beliefs that then authorize alternative, innovative means to obtain relative capacity and resource exploitation.

To understand this melding we have to take a bottom-up view of IR and systems of GG, by examining and combining multiple levels of historical analysis. There is excellent work being done in this regard, by scholars such as Checkel (2001), Hopf (2002), Johnston (1995), and Marsh (2003), to name a few. And what this work indicates is that while there will certainly be linkages between the ensembles of the future and those of the past and present, those linkages filter though internal processes and institutions that are causal in their own right. The creation of new moral purposes, and hence licensing mentalities, dominant polities, and GG systems, is contingent on this institutional layering that occurs in the act of competitive imitation. Such layering guarantees that there is never exact replication or stasis in ensembles, institutions, and polities. Hence the ensembles of the future, and the polities and GG systems that will be licensed by them, will not and cannot be those of the present. This means that
the demise of the nation-state as the dominant type of polity also spells the
demise of its meta-value ensembles and system of GG as well. What will consti-
tute the GG systems of the future will depend on what types of dominant
polities emerge from the co-determination of structure and historical process.
To argue that the contemporary GG system can flourish without the type of
polity that made it possible is to privilege history over structure and to thereby
ignore or analytically deny the very combination that makes the contemporary
GG system feasible. Those who believe otherwise are, for all theoretical and
practical purposes, confusing process with structure and what is historically
contingent with what is transhistorical. Group formation, group dynamics, and
power produce transhistorical patterns. Power provides the necessary foundation
for a common language of governance to develop among the groups of any
given period, be it the language of absolutism or individual suffrage. The govern-
nance systems that develop are historically contingent processes, neither
culminating nor teleological but reflective of the particularisms of their times.
These governance systems define what counts as legitimate group formations
and modes of action among groups, but they cannot displace the transhistorical
structure derived from power and groups, since these provide the basis for GG to
exist at all. The present system of GG affirms the centrality of nation-states
and power, even as so many activists work feverishly with international law and
existing modes of multilateralism to displace them. Unfortunately these are
excellent examples of power and difference as structural parameters for social
practice, and we as theorists do a disservice to activists everywhere by failing to
tell them that this is so.
It also matters a great deal whether we use a term like “governance” to describe
the order, organization, and rules that the powerful have imposed on the cosmos of
our time. For most of us the term “governance,” like the term “regimes” before it,
is “value-loaded in that it takes for granted...that greater order and managed
interdependence should be the collective goal” (Strange 1983: 345). Yet this
“governance” is merely the internal meta-value ensembles of particular groups,
who have proven adept at amassing relative power for themselves in this particular
historical moment in time, and who have ordered inter-group relations according
to their own particular licensing mentalities. It is a governance system that, as with
all other systems that have come before it or will develop in the future, is neither
eternal nor equitable in its particulars. Ultimately it will rise and fall with those
polities who have, by virtue of their relative power, been able to promote it,
because human beings are social creatures who inevitably form groups, and groups
inevitably compete for resources and hence power. As with all other governance
systems that have come before it or will come in the future, its particulars reinforce
the essentiality of power and do nothing to overcome it.
And more to the point of this particular exercise, we should be particularly
careful when embarking on the development of new approaches with grand
labels such as “global governance” that we do not merely take the historically
contingent processes of the moment as the basis for understanding global poli-
tics. Since doing so will only reify this particular historical moment and its
concomitant but unstated value-biases, we will be left incapable of explaining the world around us. We need instead to confront the puzzle of co-determination and this, I believe, will lead us back to realism; an approach which is hardly new but which leaves us capable of explaining a great deal. This too was one of Strange’s dragons and it bears repeating:

If (as so many books in international relations have concluded) we need better “tools of analysis,” it is not because we will be able to dig up golden nuggets with them. Those nuggets—the great truths about human society and human endeavor—were all discovered long ago. What we need are constant reminders so that we do not forget them.

(1983: 351)

The existence of governance on a global scale is itself a constant reminder of these truths, yet we IR scholars may be on the verge of digging it under by trying to develop yet one more “new” analytical approach that will fail miserably to understand it.

Notes


2 Constructivists, for example, have tended to actively encourage the belief in “a different logic of transformation, one driven more by self-conscious efforts to change structures of identity and interest than by unintended consequences,” which, as Wendt himself then acknowledges, would “seem to contradict the spirit of constructivism” (1992: 418–19). Dunn has observed that, “This is arguably one of the most significant weaknesses of Wendt’s and Onuf’s international theories, in that they have a tendency to imply that the social world can be reconstituted simply by reconstructing our identity from ‘within’ (a phenomenological perspective)” (1995: 373). It is a problem which Kratochvil has noted as well (1996: 196).

3 Other theoretical perspectives such as world systems theory or historical materialism have remained committed to structuralism as well, while increasingly attempting to analytically grapple with indeterminacy. As Denemark has observed, this undoubtedly results from a legitimate attempt to “embrace reflectivity and avoid determinism while not abandoning their search to understand historically similar circumstances and structural constraints” (1999: 66). See, for example, the work of Arrighi and Silver (1999) or Thompson and Modelski (1999).

4 See, for example, Gilpin (1981); Buzan, Jones, and Little (1993); Reus-Smit (1999); Buzan and Little (2000).

5 There are many different types of realism, including classical, neo-defensive, tragic, offensive, evil, and neoclassical. For reviews of these differences, see Spirtas (1996); Brooks (1997); Jervis (1999). Neoclassical realists comprise a small contingent interested in exploring the relationship between the anarchic international system, domestic- and individual-level intervening variables, and international outcomes. Rose discusses various neoclassical realists who examine domestic institutions and structures as intervening variables (1998), while others, such as Mercer (1995), Talliaferro (2000/01), or myself (2002), have been more interested in exploring psychology, emotions, and biology as intervening variables.
6 Of these, Hall’s treatment of identity and realism remains one of the best examples. His “will-to-manifest-identity” is the link between the individual and the collective, and he explicitly juxtaposes the concept to realism. However, one of Hall’s sources for this concept is Bloom (1990), who argues in turn that the need to identify is rooted in species survival and remains a necessity for human infants in this regard.

7 Although there is a clear compatibility between constructivism and “neoclassical” realism, it is possible to find elements of constructivism in neo-realism as well. Inayatullah and Blaney (1996) have pointed out that Waltz’s discussion of socialization and his reliance on the play “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” as analogous to international structure is quite similar to basic constructivist tenets. In arguing that the couple’s “activities cannot be understood without considering the system that emerges from their interactions,” Waltz is in essence suggesting that interaction creates a structure which none of its participants control but which nonetheless has an unintended impact on norms and behavior (1979: 74). Although Inayatullah and Blaney note that subsequent realist scholarship ignored this point, the implication is that “surely socialization also gives meaning and purpose to our actions and thoughts,” and so it would seem “necessary to connect socialization to meanings, as Waltz himself hints” (1996: 69).

8 Ray implies a similar distinction between form/structure and content/history when comparing the inability of IR theorists to predict the end of the Cold War and meteorologists who “understand hurricanes quite well and, in retrospect can explain quite convincingly the process that produces them and why they hit when and where they do. What they cannot do is to predict specifically, years or even months in advance, when and where a major hurricane will occur” (1995: 350).

9 In Mesopotamia it was kingships, in Greece it was city-states, in China it was dynastic empires, in Mesoamerica it was urban empires, in the Islamic world it was tribal empire, and in Medieval Italy it was towns and cities (Ferguson and Mansbach 1996: Chapters 3–14).

10 The governance systems Reus-Smit examines include those created by the Greek city-states (which promoted arbitration), the Italian city-states (which promoted oratorical diplomacy), the absolutist states (which promoted old diplomacy), and the nation-state (which promote international law and multilateralism). See also Reus-Smit (2001).

11 Or, as Dunne has put it, “International society exists as a social fact. Like all social structures it is unobservable but its effects are real. The structure embodies rules of identifying who gets to count as a member, what conduct is appropriate, and what (if any) consequences follow from acts of deviancy” (2001: 89).

12 See, for example, Gilpin (1981) or Schweller and Priess (1997).

13 As Buzan, Jones, and Little (1993) have argued, however, technology and interaction capacity have made it increasingly difficult to isolate oneself from systemic effects.

14 For more extended expositions on this phenomenon, see Sterling-Folker (2002: 76–92) or (2001: 90–100).


16 Indeed, given that the principles upon which multilateralism rests are, according to Ruggie (1993) and other contributors to the “Multilateralism Matters” literature, a mixture of American self-interest and socially constructed perspectives on politics and world order, the term “multilateralism” to describe this phenomenon sounds more than a little contradictory and self-serving.

17 Smith provides a good example in his study of the evolution of humanitarian laws of war which, thanks to pressure from the powerful, now legitimize a new sort of violence “that licenses hi-tech states to launch wars as long as their conduct is deemed just,” and allows hi-tech states to “defend hugely destructive, essentially unopposed, aerial bombardments by citing the authority of seemingly secular and universal legal standards” (2001: 356, 370).
18 See, for example, Fowler (1996) or Clark, Friedman, and Hochstetler (1998).
20 For example, Zacher (1992) or Wendt (1999; Chs 6–7).
21 In fact, Reus-Smit’s discussion of the GG system promoted by absolutist states underscores that normative complexes, GG systems, and the structural demands of particularism can be nearly synonymous (1999; Ch. 5).
22 Which leads, in turn, to on-going attempts to actually implement universal ethics across a variety of global issue areas. Small wonder, then, that Ottaway finds, despite a genuine commitment “in theory” to reconstruct post-conflict countries according to a democratic model, that the international community “lacks the political will to really try” (2003: 315). Indeed her findings that — “the result is a growing discrepancy between the model that is propounded and the policies that are actually practiced” — is a descriptive statement of fact for contemporary GG.

References


